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THE ORIGINS OF GAṆEŚA

Gaṇeśa is worshipped in all parts of India, being the most popular of all the gods of the Hindu pantheon. He is non-sectarian in character inasmuch as followers of all sects and denominations, Śaivites, Vaiṣṇavites, Buddhists and Jinas, pay homage to him. Brahmā and the other gods also pay homage to him at the commencement of any of their enterprises or works. There are more shrines in India dedicated to him than to any other deity. As one of the Paurāṇic *pañca devatās* he is equated with the other great gods of Hinduism, Śiva, Viṣṇu, Śakti and Sūrya. He enjoys priority of worship (*agrahūjā*). His name is invoked at the beginning of all secular and religious undertakings like the construction of a house or the beginning of a journey; performance of all *saṁskāras* or domestic rites like the *garbhādāna* (conception), *jatākarma* (tonsure), *upanayana* (sacred thread), marriage; in the opening sentence of a book or letter, or at the commencement of all religious rites, by the *śrauta* (Vedic), *smārta* (*śāstric* and *paurāṇic*), or *tāntric*. The words uttered are: *Gaṇeśāya Vighneśvarāya namaḥ* (obeisance to Gaṇeśa, the Lord of obstacles). He is considered as *siddhidātā* (bestower of success), *buddhidātā* (bestower of wisdom) and *vriddhidātā* (bestower of wealth and success). He is figured as a being with the head of an elephant and the body of a human being, riding or surmounted on a rat. He has numerous epithets: Gajānana (elephant-faced), Lambodara (pot-bellied), Ekdanta (one-tusked, with the other broken), Gaṇādhipa (Lord of *gaṇas* or hosts), Vināyaka (great leader or lord), Vighneśvara or Vighnarāja (Lord of obstacles).

Paurāṇic Legends:

The *Skandapurāṇa*¹ ascribes the creation of Gaṇeśa to Pārvatī out of the impurities of her body. The *Matsyapurāṇa*² repeats the same legend, adding that its face was like that of an elephant and that it came to life after immersion in the waters of the Ganges. Pārvatī adopted him as her son. According to the *Lingapurāṇa*³ 150,4,6 Gaṇeśa was specially created by Śiva to checkmate the *asuras* who cause injury to the *devas* and for the destruction of the *daityas*. The *Varāhapurāṇa* 23⁴ says that it was a very handsome boy, who sprang from the laugh of Śiva, and aroused the desire of Pārvatī. Śiva, becoming jealous, cursed him, making him elephant-headed and potbellied, and chief of the *Vināyakas*.

¹ Haridas Mitra, *Gaṇapati*, Santiniketan; reprinted from *Visva Bharati Annals*, VIII.

² S.G. Kantawala, *Cultural History from the Matsyapurāṇa*, Baroda 1964, pp. 189–190. Also V.S. Agrawala, *Matsyapurāṇa, a Study*, Varanasi 1963, p. 267.

³ J.L. Sastri, (ed. and transl.), *Lingapurāṇa*, Delhi 1973, Pt. II, p. 577.

⁴ Quoted by P.V. Kane, *History of Dharmasāstras*, Poona 1958, V, pt. 1, p. 149.

According to the *Vāmanapurāṇa*⁵ (xxvii, 58, 59, 64–70) Gaṇeśa was created by Pārvatī alone from her bodily filth while bathing, and for that reason the *purāṇa* describes him as *mala puruṣa* (filth-born being). It was by a mixing of the sweat of Umā (Pārvatī) and Śankara (Śiva) that he acquired a trunk. Śiva called him a Vināyaka as he was born to Pārvatī without a husband, *nāyaka*, (*Vāmana* xxviii, 71–72), and predicted that he would cause 1000 impediments to the gods.

According to the legends current in Nepal,⁶ however, Gaṇeśa was not created by Śiva and Pārvatī but became manifest of his own will, *svayambhū*; he is called Sūrya-Vināyaka.

The *Purāṇas* also explain the genesis of the elephant head. According to the *Śivapurāṇa*⁷ 136.18 Pārvatī wanted an attendant of her own, as the *gaṇas* of Rudra and the Pramathas only carry out the orders of Śiva. So she created Gaṇeśa out of the scrubbings from her body, without the intervention of Śiva. Gaṇeśa kept guard outside her apartment. Once he objected to Śiva's entering while she was bathing. This angered Śiva, and a fight ensued between his *gaṇas* and Gaṇeśa, in which the former were defeated and fled. By a stratagem Śiva cut off Gaṇeśa's head; in turn this aroused the anger of Pārvatī, and she created 1000 goddesses, *śaktis*, to fight the killers of Gaṇeśa. This led to a great battle, which wrought destruction in the ranks of the gods. They were forced to sue for peace, which eventually was restored on the condition that Gaṇapati be brought back to life, and be treated as chief presiding officer among the gods. On Śiva's command his host of deities brought the head of the first living being that they met, which happened to be an elephant, and fixed it on the trunk of Gaṇapati. That head had only one tusk; hence Gaṇapati is called Ekadanta, single-tusked. Revived, he was crowned by the gods, and appointed leader of the *gaṇas*.

According to the *Brahmavaivarta purāṇa*⁸ Kṛṣṇa in the form of a boy appeared in Pārvatī's apartment. The gods were invited to see the baby, Gaṇeśa, after its birth. The gaze of Śani (Saturn) reduced the head of Gaṇeśa to ashes; the head restored was that of an elephant.

According to the *Suprabhedāgama*⁹ Śiva and Pārvatī once assumed the bodies of elephants to enjoy themselves, and it was from that union that the elephant-headed Gaṇapati was born.

Thus we can see that the Paurāṇic accounts about the origin of Gaṇeśa are inconsistent and conflicting.

According to the *Gaṇeśapurāṇa*¹⁰ there have been four different forms of Vināyaka in the four ages of the Hindus. In the Kṛtayuga he is called Mahotakṣa Vināyaka, being born to Kaśyapa and Aditi. He has no elephant head, and has a lion as his vehicle. In the Tretāyuga he is called Mayūreśvara, being born to Pārvatī. He is not endowed with an elephant head, and has a peacock as his vehicle. In the Dvāparayuga he is called Gajānana, is born to Śiva and Pārvatī, possesses an elephant head and has a rat as his vehicle. In the Kaliyuga he is called Dhūmaketu Vināyaka; his features are not described, and his vehicle is a horse. Thus it is in

⁵ The *Vāmanapurāṇa*, ed. A.S. Gupta, transl. by various scholars, Varanasi 1968.

⁶ Sylvain Lévi, *Le Népal*, Paris 1905, I, p. 384.

⁷ Ed. by J. L. Shastri, Delhi 1969. Most of the *purāṇas* include this in the list of 18 great *purāṇas*.

⁸ R.N. Sen transl., Allahabad 1920, III, 9, 1–20 and 12, 1–21.

⁹ T.A.G. Gopinatha Rao, *Elements of Hindu Iconography*, pp. 44–45. This legend appears to be the source of the Japanese deity Shoden or Kangiten, "the joy-giving god", who was conceived when Śiva and Pārvatī had changed themselves into elephants. See Michael Czaja, *Gods of Myth and Stone*, Tokyo 1974, p. 177.

¹⁰ See the *Gaṇeśa Lilā* in *Gaṇeśa aṅka*, *Kalyāṇa* (in Hindi), Gita Press, Gorakhpur. The *Gaṇeśapurāṇa* is not classified as one of the major *purāṇas*.

the Dvāpara age, i.e. prior to the present, that he has his classic appearance, the elephant head, four arms, and the rat *vāhana*.

We learn also the anomalous fact that he is worshipped by Śiva and Pārvatī before their marriage ceremony is performed. This unusual circumstance is reflected in art: thus the scenes in the Rāmeśvara temple at Ellora¹¹ and at Kanaūj¹² showing the marriage of Śiva and Pārvatī depict both Gaṇeśa and Skanda as attendants.

Again, the *purāṇa* version in which the *gaṇas* fight Pārvatī's son cannot truly account for his title Gaṇeśa since it makes him their enemy instead of their lord.

The variant which makes his sire Kṛṣṇa incarnate as a boy clearly reflects the sectarian conflict between Śaivism and Viṣṇuism.

It is evident that the *Purāṇas* made strenuous efforts to justify Gaṇapati's admission into the Hindu pantheon, by one fanciful story or another. It may be noted, finally, that according to a verse of doubtful authenticity attributed to Manu, Śiva is the god of Brahmins, Viṣṇu the god of Kṣatriyas, Brahmā the god of Vaiśyas, and Gaṇanāyaka the god of Śūdras; i.e. of the lowest class in caste society.¹³

Gaṇeśa in Art:

Gaṇeśa is said to appear in sculpture some centuries earlier than in literature. It has been argued that a silver drachm of the Indo-Greek King Hermaeus dating about 50 B.C. represents him as a throned male deity with an elephant's head.¹⁴ A terracotta plaque of the first century B.C. or A.D., found in the excavations at Rairh in Jaipur,¹⁵ is thought to show a Vaināyaki, a female deity having the head of an elephant. Likewise on two clay tablets unearthed in the digs at Sambhar bearing a figure claimed as elephant-headed is called Gaṇeśa.¹⁶ However all these identifications are highly speculative. On the coin of Hermaeus, (now in the British Museum), tusks and ears are missing, and the trunk cannot be distinguished from the elephant's head as a whole. Again it is most exceptional that a Gaṇeśa should be shown in three-quarters view seated on a throne usually occupied by Zeus in Indo-Greek coins. As a general rule such round silver coins bear the likeness of a ruler, whereas gods or animals are depicted on square copper coins.¹⁷ The reverse of gold or silver pieces generally bears the figure of a Greek deity; exceptional variants are the figures of a bull, an owl, a horseman.¹⁸

The terracotta from Jaipur is greatly damaged; the original excavation report gives no description of the plaque, and from the photograph no conclusive identification is permissible.¹⁹ In regard to the clay tablets discovered at Sambhar, the excavator D.R. Sahni himself entertained doubts whether the figure shown could be called Gaṇeśa.²⁰

¹¹ Gopinatha Rao, *op.cit.*, vol.II, ii, p. 347, pl.CV.

¹² C. Sivaramamurti, *Indian Sculpture*, New Delhi 1961, p. 94, pl. 34.

¹³ Mitra, *op.cit.* p. 33.

¹⁴ A.K. Narain, "On the earliest Gaṇeśa," *Senarat Paranavitana Commemoration Volume*, Prematilleke, Indrapala, and van Lohuizen eds., Leiden 1978.

¹⁵ B.N. Sharma, *Iconography of Vaināyaki*, New Delhi 1979, fig. 1.

¹⁶ D.R. Sahni, *Archaeological Remains and Excavations at Sambhar* 1936-38, Jaipur 1940, pl. VII, d-e.

¹⁷ R.B. Whitehead, "Notes on the Indo-Greeks, pt.II," *Numismatic Chronicle*, London 1947, p. 29.

¹⁸ A.N. Lahiri, *Corpus of Indo Greek Coins*, Calcutta 1965, *passim*.

¹⁹ K.N. Puri, *Excavations at Rairh*, 1938-39 and 1939-40, Jaipur, p. 29, pl. XIV, f.

²⁰ Sahni stated that the identification with Gaṇeśa was based on the male figure having a fat belly with an elephant's ear on the left side, the other ear being damaged; while the Brahmī inscription *karabhikṣa* meant "of one possessed with an

Coomaraswamy had suggested that a Gaṇeśa-like *yakṣa* depicted on a coping fragment among the Amarāvati sculptures was the precursor of the classical Gaṇapati.²¹ This proposition has won general acceptance,²² but is far-fetched. The supposed elephant head lacks trunk and tusks. Apparently the Amarāvati sculptors were intent on portraying mythical creatures of all kinds with wings, horns, etc., and thus endowed a *gaṇa* with some characteristics of an elephant's head but not the most important.

Another untenable suggestion made by Coomaraswamy is that the earliest iconographic representation of Gaṇeśa is an elephant-faced *gaṇa* on the Kantaka Cetinga *stūpa* of the second or third century A.D. in Sri Lanka. A number of *gaṇas* are represented there:²³ some play musical instruments, one sports with a cobra, another stands on his head. Many are animal-headed, such as those of the horse, bear, or monkey. The one with the elephant head is merely one among these, not their lord.

The Śiva temple at Bhumara (fifth century A.D.) also presents many *gaṇas* with animal or bird heads, such as the lion, bear, monkey, bull, or parrot, and two others with a lion head and a demon head on their bellies²⁴. Gaṇeśa himself is seen in a large medallion as well as in the round, but there is no suggestion that he is lord of the group of *gaṇas*.²⁵ It is natural to conclude that in both these cases nothing more than artistic fancy was involved.

Probably the earliest intended representation of Gaṇeśa is to be found on a bas relief of the Kushan period from Mathura, which depicts five elephant-headed *yakṣas* or *gaṇas*.²⁶ This is followed by a stone in high relief from the Fatehgarh district, U.P.;²⁷ a Gaṇeśa from Mathura (fig. 1), ascribed to the late third century;²⁸ and a small Guptan terracotta from monastery II at Sarnath.²⁹ There is also an early representation in stucco at the base of the brick structure (fourth-fifth century) of the Maniyar Math mound excavated at Rajgir.³⁰

From the fifth century on Gaṇeśa images appear in different parts of India: in the Udayagiri Caves near Sanchi (fourth-fifth);³¹ on a terracotta from Bhitargaon (early Gupta);³² from Nachna (Madhya Pradesh, fifth);³³ Elephanta, Tanesara and Aurangabad (Western India); at Śamalaji in Gujarat (fourth-fifth);³⁴ and at the Śiva temple at Bhumara (sixth), these being in

elephant's trunk or Gaṇapati." He admitted, however, that *karabha* may also mean a young camel, and added: "Unfortunately the face of the figure is damaged and there is nothing to show that it has the trunk of an elephant, *gajamukha*. There are vestiges of a *cauri* on the right shoulder which would be inappropriate in a representation of Gaṇeśa."

²¹ A.K. Coomaraswamy in *Boston Museum Bull.*, 1928, no. 154, p. 30.

²² Sivaramamurti, *Amarāvati Sculptures in the Madras Museum*, Madras 1956, p. 158, pl. IV.

²³ J.M. Senaveratna, *Guide to Mihintale*, Archaeological Dept. of Ceylon, 1952, quoting *Ann. Rep. of Archaeol. Dept.*, 1905.

²⁴ R.D. Banerji, *The Temple of Śiva at Bhumara*, Archaeol. Survey of India Memoirs, no. 16, 1924, pls. IXc, Xc.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 12, 13, pl. XVa, b.

²⁶ V.S. Agrawala, *Mathura Museum Catalogue*, U.P. Hist. Soc. 1952, pt. III, pp. 106–107.

²⁷ A. Getty, *Gaṇeśa*, Oxford, 1936, p. 26, pl. 2a.

²⁸ Mathura Mus. accession no. 15.758, datable by style. An interesting image in the round of Gaṇeśa with a male figure carved on its back is also to be ascribed to Mathura; see S. Kramrisch, *Manifestations of Śiva*, Philadelphia, 1981, p. 75, pl. 61 (editor's note).

²⁹ Archaeol. Survey of India, *Ann. Rep.* 1907–08, p. 56.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1905–06, p. 104.

³¹ J.N. Banerjee, *The Development of Hindu Iconography*, Calcutta, 1956, p. 359, pl. XV, 1.

³² Archaeol. Survey of India, *Ann. Rep.*, 1908–09, p. 10.

³³ Aschwin Lippe, "Early Chalukya Icons," *Artibus Asiae*, Vol. XXXIV, 4, 1972, p. 276.

³⁴ Sivaramamurti, *Indian Sculpture*, New Delhi, 1961, p. 67.

the north and west. From the south are: Pedavegi near Ellore in Andhra Pradesh (fourth-fifth), where the Śālaṅkāyanas ruled at Vengi;³⁵ and the Peddamuḍiyam plaque from Cuddapah, also Andhra Pradesh, of the early Pallava period (sixth-ninth A.D.).³⁶ At this time Gaṇeśa had become one of the principal gods of the Hindu pantheon.

Outside India the earliest iconographic representations are two stone statues from Afghanistan (figs. 2, 3) one from Sakai Dhar near Kabul (fourth century) and the other from Gardez with an inscription in Brāhmī (fifth century).³⁷ A terracotta from Akra in present Pakistan is also datable to about the fifth century.³⁸ Gaṇeśa was also popular in other Asian countries, Sri Lanka, Burma, Thailand, Java and Bali, Cambodia and Champa, Tibet, Chinese Turkestan, China and Japan. This material must await treatment elsewhere.

The earliest Gaṇeśa sculptures are two-armed; none has any vehicle. Among the early images cited above, the Mathuran figure in third century Kushan style (fig. 1) holds a bowl of cakes with one hand and with the other perhaps a tusk; the cake-bowl is visible also in the early Guptan Gaṇeśa of the Udayagiri cave near Sanchi.³⁹

The early Guptan Bhitargaon plaque shows four arms, two holding identifiable attributes: in one left hand the bowl of cakes, while the right hand makes the *tarjani mudrā*.⁴⁰ The sixth century statue from Bhumara⁴¹ (fig. 4) also has four arms, holding an axe, a broken tusk, a sceptre, and embracing a *śakti*.

Gopinatha Rao cites texts and sculptures of Gaṇeśa having four, six, eight, ten, or sixteen arms.⁴²

We suggest that the two-armed figures belong to an early iconographic stage in which he was conceived as Vighneśa, lord of evils or obstacles. On his admission to the hierarchy of Paurāṇic gods, he was endowed with four. As a *tāntric* divinity his arms were further multiplied and he was associated with a *śakti*. In the "classical" form he is endowed with a pot belly; four arms, later still more, holding a hatchet (*paraśu*), sweetmeats (*laḍḍus* or *modaka*), a broken tusk or stylus for writing, and a noose (*pāśa*) or goad (*aṅkuśa*), or in the *varada* or *abhaya mudrās*. A snake is tied around his body as a sacred thread and he rides or surmounts a rat. The last feature becomes common only in late sculptures and literature (fig. 5). A rat *vāhana* occurs on the Mukteśvara temple at Bhubaneśvara, from the tenth or eleventh century.⁴³ In the useful compilations of Chola practise published by Balasubramanyam, the volume on the early period (tenth century) contains only one example out of 23 plates, from Aditurai.⁴⁴ In the Middle Chola volume (985–1070) there are three occurrences out of 21.⁴⁵ The more general

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

³⁷ G. Tucci, "Preliminary report of an archeological survey in Swat," *East and West*, IX, 1958, p. 328, Also R.C. Aggarwala, *ibid.*, XVIII, 1968, pp. 166–168.

³⁸ Getty, *op. cit.*, p. 26, pl. 2a.

³⁹ See text above at fns. 28, 33.

⁴⁰ See text above at fns. 32, 25.

⁴¹ See above and fn. 24.

⁴² Rao, *Elements*, vol. I, pt. 1, pp. 50–59.

⁴³ Debala Mitra, *Bhubaneśvara*, Arch. Surv. of India, New Delhi 1958, p. 37.

⁴⁴ *Early Chola Temples* (907–985 A.D.), New Delhi 1971, pl. 124. Other possible instances fail to show the base.

⁴⁵ *Middle Chola Temples* (985–1070 A.D.), New Delhi 1975, pls. 134, 294, 311.

coverage of the Chola period given by Douglas Barrett shows Gaṇeśa in five plates, but no vehicle.⁴⁶

Literary evidence found in the *Viṣṇudharmottara*, the *Bhaviṣyapurāṇa*, the *Lingapurāṇa*, the *Mālatīmādhava* and the *Mahāvīra-carita* of Bhavabhūti, and the *Śiṣupālavadha* of Māgha lacks any mention of the rat vehicle. The *Silparatna* describes a five-faced Gaṇeśa who rides a lion. The *Sukranītisāra*, iv, 4, 169 permits any animal to be his vehicle. A basic text, the *Gaṇeśapurāṇa* (1100–1500) places a Gaṇapati in each of the four cosmic periods, as we have seen, but furnishes only the god preceding the present *yuga* with a rat; the others receive a lion, a peacock, and a horse. The rat is explained by a trivial anecdote.⁴⁷

From the uses of the terms *gaṇapati* and *gaṇas* in the *Rigveda* (ii, 23, 1 and x, 112, 9), the *Yajurveda* (*śukla mādhyandin saṃhitā*, 16–25, 22.30 and 23.19) and the *Taittirīya saṃhitā* iv, 1.2.2 – Vāj. 2.15)⁴⁸ many scholars have concluded that the references are to the familiar elephant-headed Gaṇeśa. This is clearly erroneous for the following reasons:

The *Aitareya Brāhmaṇa* (1, 21) and the *Kauṣītaki Brāhmaṇa* (viii, 5) make it clear that in the first Rigvedic hymn cited above (ii, 23, 1) the term *gaṇapati* is addressed to Brahmanaspati or Brhaspati.⁴⁹

The Vedic *bhāṣyakāras* or commentators of the mediaeval period in no case find a reference to Gaṇeśa in the hymns cited above.⁵⁰ Instead they interpret *gaṇapati* in a wide variety of ways: as lord of the hosts of gods;⁵¹ as lord of all creatures;⁵² specifically as Indra;⁵³ as Rudra, lord of beasts, especially horses;⁵⁴ as the horse, lord of hosts;⁵⁵ as lord of the gathering of women.⁵⁶

These commentaries establish conclusively that the term *gaṇapati* in the *Vedas* was not identified with the elephant-headed and pot-bellied Gaṇeśa, and that the word *gaṇas* did not mean the mischief-making hosts of Śiva's attendants. It is noteworthy that the *Gaṇeśapurāṇa*, iv, 33, long after Gaṇeśa's identification as a Vedic god, makes the direct admission that the

⁴⁶ *Early Chola Architecture and Sculpture* (866–1014 A.D.), London 1974, pls. 23a, 28, 46, 64, 81a.

⁴⁷ See above and fn. 10. The story is told that a Gandharva, Kauṇika, was transformed into a rat by Vāmadeva's curse. As a rat he ate up the grain, damaged the books, clothes etc. of the sage Parāśara; so Gajānana threw his noose around it and made it his *vāhana*.

⁴⁸ See in general R.C. Hazra, "Gaṇa-pati worship and the Upapurāṇas dealing with it," *Journal of the Ganganath Jha Research Inst.*, vol. V, pt. 4, 1948, pp. 267–68, fns. 17, 18, 20, 21.

⁴⁹ A. B. Keith, trans., *The Rigvedic Brāhmaṇas*, Harvard Oriental Series vol. 25, 1920.

⁵⁰ The texts of the Vedic commentaries have been kindly made available by Mr. K. V. Sarma of the Vishveshwaran and Vishva Bandhu Institute of Sanskrit and Indological Studies, Hoshiarpur. Their individual writers are: Venkaṭamādhava and Uvaṭa, both 11th cent.; Sāyaṇa and Bhaṭṭabhāskara, both 14th cent.; and Mahīdhara, 16th cent. It is true that the *Maitrāyaṇi Saṃhitā* section of the *Yajurveda* contains a *mantra* addressed to a deity called *Karāta-bastimukha danti*, an obvious reference to an elephant-headed god. But this like other hymns addressed to Rudra, Gauri, Skanda, Brahmā, Viṣṇu etc. is a later addition, since this nomenclature is definitely post-Vedic (e.g. Keśava-Nārāyaṇa used for Viṣṇu). The *Samhitā* sections of the *Taittirīya* and *Vājasaneyi* do not contain these *mantras*. The different list contained in the *Taittirīya Aranyaka* has been preserved in two recensions that diverge markedly in the deities they name. Neither the *Samhitā* nor the *Aranyaka* lists are dependable. Thus the appellation Vakratuṇḍa (an elephant with a twisted trunk) occurring in the *T. Aranyaka*, x, 1.5, is an addition, as is the laudatory verse for Vināyaka in the *Baudhāyana Smṛti*, ii, 5.9.3.

⁵¹ Thus Venkaṭamādhava and Sāyaṇa commenting on *Rig.* ii, 23.1 and *Yajur Taittirīya*, xxiii, 14.3.

⁵² Thus Bhaṭṭabhāskara on the *mantras* referred to above.

⁵³ Thus Sāyaṇa on *Rig.* x, 112.9.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.* on *Yajur Taittirīya*, iv, 1.2.2 and *Vājasaneyi*, ii, 15.

⁵⁵ Thus Mahīdhara on *Yajur Mādhyandin*, xxiii, 19.

⁵⁶ Thus Uvaṭa on the *mantras*. Sāyaṇa and Mahīdhara interpret the word *gaṇapatebhyas* in *Taittirīya*, iv, 54.1 (*Vāj.* 16.25) as *devānucara*. To Sāyaṇa *devānucara* means "follower of gods" and to Mahīdhara a special being (*bhūta viśeṣa*).

ṛṣi, or sages, *Brahmā*, the *Vedas*, the *Upaniṣads*, and the six *Śāstras* do not know the true nature of Gaṇeśa.

A dominant feature of Vedic mythology is the fact that little attention is paid to animal fetishes, the gods being conceived of as mighty men dwelling in heaven. Though certain animals may have been given a totemistic importance in the choice of names, such as the tortoise, the fish, the goat, the calf, or the owl, this is not true of the elephant, *gaja* or *hastinī*.

The term “Gaṇeśa” as now understood, appears rather late in literature.⁵⁷ Its true precursor seems to have been one of its present synonyms, *Vināyaka*. The latter, in the plural, signified evil spirits. In the *Mahābhārata*⁵⁸ (Vaṅgavāsi ed. iii, 65, 23; xii, 284, 131; xiii, 150, 25) they are spoken of as unfriendly, malignant beings like *bhūtas*, *rākṣasas*, and *piśācas*. In the *Mānavagrhya sūtra*⁵⁹ of the seventh to fifth century B.C. a group of four *Vināyakas* is named. Persons possessed by them are forced into frustration; they are an impediment to princes in seeking a kingdom, in trading and farming, in marrying or bearing children.

Texts of the Guptan period, the *Yājñavalkya Smṛti* and the *Viṣṇudharmottara*, continue to name a group of four, but reveal concepts closer to the final Gaṇeśa.⁶⁰ *Vināyakas* cause obstacles, but may also bring success in actions and in the performance of rituals (*yajña*). The being may be described as elephant-headed or elephant-faced, or as lord of *gaṇas* by appointment by *Brahmā* and *Indra*. Their power may still be predominantly evil. Thus the seventh century author *Bāṇabhatta* in his *Kādambarī*⁶¹ speaks of an unlucky idol of *Mahāvināyaka* as a sum of evils: the great worm, the great disease, evil portents, dangerous poison, dangerous beasts, the tempest, evil planets, an evil snake-like nature, loveless, lacking in any goodness, etc. The same author⁶² describes a group of female recluses as reciting hymns in praise of the major gods of the time under variant names, *Śiva*, *Pārvatī*, their son *Kārttikeya*, *Viṣṇu*, the *Jina* *Āryaśaṅkara*, the *Arhat*, *Brahmadeva*, but not Gaṇeśa or *Vināyaka*. Another lingering sign of ill repute is the fact that they receive offerings of wine, fish, and flesh, all generally taboo in the Hinduism of that time.

In brief, neither Gaṇeśa nor *Vināyaka* occurs in the *Vedas*. In post-epic literature, Gaṇeśa is first a *Vināyaka*, lord of evils, and then a *vighnabartā*, remover of evils. In the *Mānavagrhya Sūtra* and the *Yājñavalkya Smṛti* he is not called elephant-headed, but he is so described in the *Viṣṇudharmottara*. Neither *Mānava* nor *Viṣṇudharmottara* calls him leader of the *gaṇas* but *Yajña* 271 makes him the leader of *gaṇas*, appointed by *Brahmā* and *Indra*. He fuses in himself not only the different *Vināyakas* but also other evil forces represented by the *matṛgaṇas*, mother goddesses, and the *grahas*, planets, as we shall see below.

⁵⁷ The legend that Gaṇeśa acted as scribe for Vyāsa in writing down the *Mahābhārata* appears in the north Indian recension of the epic, but is missing in the south Indian *granthā*; in the former it appears to be an interpolation. Cf. M. Winternitz, “Gaṇeśa in the *Mahābhārata*,” *Jour. of the Royal Asi. Soc.*, 1898, pp. 380–382.

⁵⁸ See Hazra, *op. cit.*, pp. 266–267, fns. 8, 13, 15, 16.

⁵⁹ Ramakrishna Harshaji Sastri ed., *Mānavagrhya Sūtra*, Gaekwad Oriental Series vol. XXXV, Baroda 1926. Also R. G. Bhandarkar, *Vaiṣṇavism, Śaivism and Minor Religious Systems*, Varanasi (1965 repr.), 147.

⁶⁰ The *Viṣṇudharmottara* calls him *gajavaktra*, elephant-headed; *Bhāgavatpurāṇa*, I, 139 has *ekadanta*, one-tusked, and *gajānana*, elephant-faced; *Daśakumāracarita*, iii, has *hasti-vaktra bhagavān*, elephant-headed god.

⁶¹ Ed. Peterson, Bombay 1900, pt. 1. It may be noted that only ms. B of the *Kādambarī* begins with the usual obeisance to *Gaṇeśa-gaṇeśāya-namaḥ*, lacking in ms. A and so an interpolation.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 209, lines 1–2.

As Vigneśa, Vināyaka came easily to be identified with Śiva, or rather with the latter's Vedic antecedent, Rudra, the sum of all malevolence and wildness.⁶³ Both grew to full stature when their power over evil was extended to make them protectors and dispellers. Through this process of growth the loosely imagined Gaṇeśa became ultimately one of the five dominant Hindu gods, the *pañca devatās*, ranked as the equal of Śiva, Viṣṇu, Devī, and Sūrya. At the same time his retention of the epithet Gaṇapati made it possible for his devotees to claim for him a respectably Vedic antiquity. The devotional literature addressed to him in the mediaeval period borrows wholesale from the phraseology of the past, and appears under the great traditional titles. There is a *Gaṇeśopaniṣad*, a *Gaṇeśagītā*, and a *Gaṇeśapurāṇa*.

Gaṇeśa has come to be called lord of the heavenly hosts, wisest of the wise, lord of treasure of treasures, most adorable of adorables, supreme among those who pray, king of kings.⁶⁴ Through his epithets he is equated with Indra and Agni. It is said he is named when the *Vedas* speak of Brahmanaspati. In the *Gaṇeśapurāṇa*, 1, 69.17ff., different verses of the *Puruṣa-sūkta* of the *Rig Veda* are prescribed for invoking Gaṇeśa. The ninth to thirteenth century eulogy *Gaṇeśagītā* in both content and phraseology is almost wholly drawn from the *Bhagavadgītā*, with Gaṇeśa replacing Kṛṣṇa. He too is identified with the supreme being, and is endowed with the highest compassion, *karuṇā*, the quality of a bodhisattva.⁶⁵

In consequence of this identification with the Vedic gods Gaṇeśa was endowed with their familiar attributes, in visualization and art. Through the goad, the thunderbolt, and the lotus he rivals Indra; through the tiger-skin garment, the crescent moon emblem, and the snake as sacred thread he rivals Rudra/Śiva; through the noose he rivals Varuṇa; and through the axe he rivals Brahmanaspati. As "*buddhidātā*" he is endowed with the intelligence of Brahmanaspati, and as "*siddhidātā*" with the bountiful nature of Indra. As a proper god he is to be fed by sweets, no longer by wine, fish, and flesh.

Among the early writings that name deities in groups, Gaṇeśa is absent from the *Vedas*, Pāṇini, Kautilya's *Arthaśāstra*, the *Rāmāyaṇa* and *Mahābhārata*, and the Pāli Buddhist literature. He is not invoked in the *Gṛhya* and *Dharmasūtras* at the beginning of auspicious rites.

⁶³ A.A. Macdonell, *Vedic Mythology*, New Delhi repr. 1971, p. 75. In the *Vedas* Rudra is represented as the god of death. Cf. also R.N. Dandekar, *Some Aspects of the History of Hinduism*, Poona 1967, p. 51. It may be noted that Rudra, unlike the beneficent Vedic gods, does not engage in conflict vs. the asuras. Manu the law-giver (iii, 164), excludes from those invited to the *śrāddha* ceremonies *inter alia* those who perform *gaṇayāgas*, sacrifices to gaṇas, which the commentators take to mean performances addressed to Vināyaka or Gaṇeśa. Cf. Bühler (transl.), *The Laws of Manu*, S.B.E. vol. XXV, Delhi reprint 1967, fn to verse 164. Also Dandekar, *op. cit.*, p. 74.

⁶⁴ E.g. *Rig.* ii, 23, 1: "We call thee lord of the heavenly hosts, the wise among the wise, the most famous... the best of those who pray O Brahmanaspati..."

The *Yaj.* (*sūkta* 23, 19): "We call thee the lord of the heavenly hosts, the most adorable, the lord of the treasure of treasures..."

Compare the *Gaṇeśapurāṇa* 46, 14-15: "He [Gaṇeśa] is the wise among the wise, supreme among those who pray, Brahmanaspati. He is king of kings, lord of the treasure of treasures, the most adorable among those adored."

The *Gaṇeśapūrvatāpinī upaniṣad*, 5: "You are the lord of the heavenly hosts, the supreme being, the wise among the wise, embodiment of the highest intelligence, the king of kings, the incomparable light..."

In *ibid.*, 2: "You are the lord of heavenly hosts, the most adorable among those adored."

Thus Gaṇeśa is given Vedic epithets: Kavīnām kavi, Jyeṣṭharāja, Brahman, Brahmanaspati (from the *Rig*); Priyapatim and Nidhipatim (from the *Yajur*). In the *Gaṇeśapurāṇa*, 1, 46-78 he is called *rig-yajub - sāma sambhūti*, the embodiment of the Three *Vedas*. In *ibid.*, 1, 46-1100 he is described as Yajñapati, lord of Vedic sacrifices; in 11, 41-43 it is claimed that he incarnated himself in order to establish Vedic rites and customs.

⁶⁵ Based on Kiyoshi Yoro's *Gaṇeśagītā*, The Hague 1918, Introd.



Fig. 1 Seated Gaṇeśa image, early Gupta period. *Mathura Museum*



Fig. 2 Gaṇeśa image, ithyphallic with two attendant Gaṇas. *Kabul Museum*

All photographs have been supplied by the Archaeological Survey of India

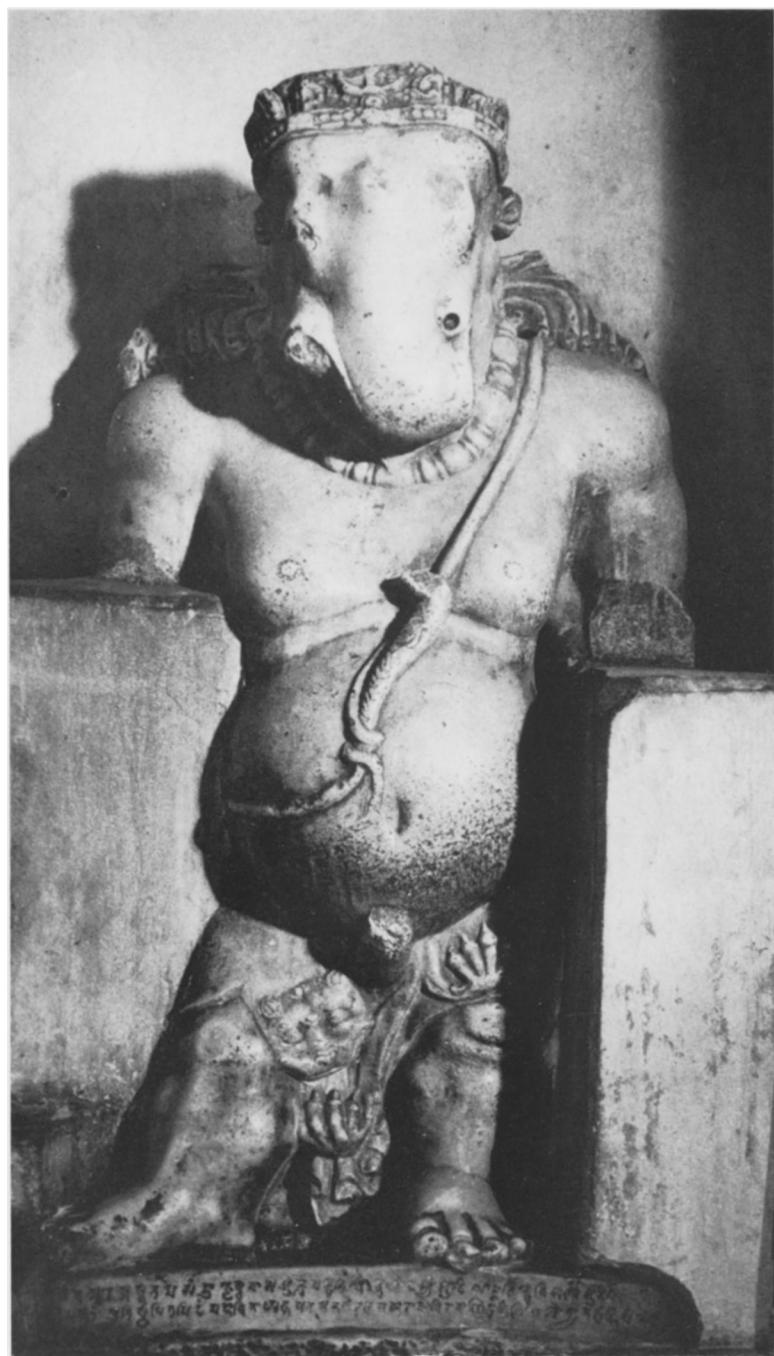


Fig. 3 Ganeśa image in Hindu temple, Kabul. Gupta period.



Fig. 4 Seated Ganeśa embracing his Śakti. Gupta period.
From Bhumara, now *Boston Museum of Fine Arts*



Fig. 5 Eight-armed Gaṇeśa above rat vehicle.
Pala period, *Lucknow Museum*



Fig. 8 Gaṇeśa trampled by the Buddhist goddess Aparājītā. Nalanda



Fig. 9 Silver drachm of Demetrios I.
Early second century B.C.



Fig. 6 Seated Gaṇeśa with row of the Seven Mothers. Seventh century, *Ellora Cave 14*



Fig. 7 Standing Gaṇeśa with row of the Nine Planets. Eleventh century.
From Kankandighi; now K.Dutt Collection, *Asutosh Museum, Calcutta*

The Nānāghāt inscription⁶⁶ of Nāgamnikā (second-first century) opens with an invocation to: Dharma, Indra, Saṃkarṣaṇa, Vāsudeva, sun and moon, four Lokapālas, Yama, Kubera, Varuṇa, Vāyu. In Brāhmī inscriptions up to ca. 300 A.D. neither Gaṇeśa nor Vināyaka figures.⁶⁷

In the Buddhist *Lalitavistara*, vii, (second A.D.)⁶⁸ the idols of Śiva, Skanda, Nārāyaṇa, Kubera, Candra, Sūrya, Vaiśravaṇa, Śakra, Brahmā, and the Lokapālas are shown to the baby Siddhārtha.

In the *Divyāvadāna* (first B.C.-second A.D.)⁶⁹ the gods named for worship to get a son are: Śiva, Varuṇa, Kuvera, Śakra, Brahmā (*ārāmadevatā, vanadevatā, sṛngatakadevatā, balipratigrabikam devatam*); *Divya* 1, 1 and 30.440.

The *Dharmasaṃgraha* vii, viii, ix, and x⁷⁰ enumerate eighteen Lokapālas including Brahmā, Sūrya, Indra, Kṛṣṇa, etc. but neither Gaṇeśa nor Vināyaka.

In the *stuti* of Yaśomati *Kalpādrumāvanamāla* (sixth century and later: f. 87, b, 2 foll. Pars. ms.)⁷¹ the Buddha is compared with mythological and religious beings outside Buddhism: with Brahmā, Viṣṇu, Śiva, Agni, Yama, the *nāgas*, Vāyu, Kubera, Māra, Pañcaśikhā (king of the Gandharvas), Garuḍa, the sun, moon, clouds, etc. but not with Gaṇeśa.

In the *Ācārāṅga sūtra*, ii, 1 2(3)⁷² of the Jaina canon, there is no reference to Gaṇeśa, though the worship of Indra, Rudra, Skanda, the *yakṣas*, the *nāgas*, and trees is mentioned. Several texts of the Guptan and early post-Guptan periods,⁷³ such as those of Kālidāsa, the *Pañcatantra*, or the *Amarakoṣa* name the war god Skanda, Kārttikeya, or Guha as the only son of Pārvatī.

Guptan coins portray Lakṣmī, Viṣṇu, Durgā, and Kumāra or Kārttikeya, but not Gaṇeśa;⁷⁴ nor is he mentioned in Guptan inscriptions. Two copper coins of Huviṣka bear the legend "Ganesa" in old Brāhmī and show an archer holding a bow with string inwards. The figure has been identified with Śiva.⁷⁵ At any rate these Kushan coins demonstrate that the name Gaṇeśa was not assigned at that period to an elephant-headed deity.

In Indian iconography theriomorphic beings like the *kinnaras*, *nāgas*, *vidyādhara*s have been habitually represented with a human head above an animal body. Gaṇeśa, on the other hand, shows the reverse. It is true that certain forms of Viṣṇu, the man-lion Narasimha, the horse-headed Hayagrīva, the boar-headed Varāha, are depicted with animal heads. But each of these is a special manifestation, an *avatāra*, of the godhead of Viṣṇu, having a limited duration for the specific purpose of destroying evil. They symbolize events in the legends of Viṣṇu that prove his supremacy; they are not cult objects in themselves, and cannot have provided models for the cult of Vināyaka. The latter's iconography, instead, must have been determined by his character as a non-vedic deity. As such he could not be represented like the true Vedic gods, in anthropomorphic fashion; and so he was given an animal head, the head of the lord of animals. In this role he shows himself as the later, paurāṇic heir of the Vedic Rudra defined as Paśupati.

⁶⁶ D.C. Sircar, *Select Inscriptions*, Calcutta 1965, vol. I.

⁶⁷ Haripada Chakraborti, *Early Brāhmī Records in India*, Calcutta 1974.

⁶⁸ P. L. Vaidya ed., *Lalitavistara*, Dharbanga 1958. Trans. by P. E. Foucaux, *Annales du musée Guimet*, VI, 1984.

⁶⁹ Vaidya ed., *Divyāvadāna*, Dharbanga 1958.

⁷⁰ K. Kasawara, Max Muller, H. Wenzl, *The Dharmasaṃgraha*, Anecdota Oxoniensia, Oxford 1885.

⁷¹ Reproduced in Speyer, *Avadāna-śataka*, St. Petersburg 1902-09, preface p. xxxv.

⁷² H. Jacobi, *Jaina Sūtras*, Sacred Books of the East vol. XXII, Delhi 2nd repr. 1968, pp. 1-213. See also fns. 89, 90 below.

⁷³ E. g. Kālidāsa, (5th A.D.), *Kumārasambhava*, v, 14; *Amarakoṣa*, 1, 1, 40; also Somadeva Sūri (10th A.D.), *Yaśastilaka*, iv, 133.

⁷⁴ S. K. Maity, *Early Indian Coins and Currency Systems*, New Delhi 1970, pp. 9-10.

⁷⁵ J. N. Banerjea, *Development of Hindu Iconography*, Calcutta 1956, p. 125.

Gaṇeśa and Skanda :

Skanda, eventually the younger brother of Gaṇeśa, is also absent from the authentic core of Vedic literature.⁷⁶ He is named in the *Atharvaveda*, but in a supplement, *pariśiṣṭa*, of apocryphal character. He is called a *piśāca*, and thus a follower of Rudra. To worship him is considered worship of a crook, *dhūrtayāga*. In texts of the Kushan period he is described as the leader of evil spirits that afflict children, or is associated with the ambivalent Mother Goddesses. In the epic period, on the other hand, he has become the leader of the *devas*, and fights the champion Mahiṣa.

No representation of Skanda in art is known prior to the first century A.D.

There is apparently a close connection between the roles of Gaṇeśa and Skanda as one-time gods of evil, who in the end were taken into the Hindu pantheon at a high level.

Gaṇeśa and the Mother Goddesses :

In relatively late religious literature and art, Gaṇeśa/Vināyaka is found associated with seven or eight divine mothers. In one text, the *Yājñavalkya*, 290,⁷⁷ Vināyaka is called the son of Ambikā, to whom his worshippers should offer obeisance. The *Gobhilaśmṛti*⁷⁸ directs that all rites should begin with an act of worship of Gaṇeśa and the *mātris*.

In iconography, the seven Mother Goddesses are usually though not invariably shown in a row with Virabhadra (Śiva) at one end and Gaṇeśa at the other. The *Mayamata*⁷⁹ and the *Rupamaṇḍana* stipulate that this arrangement should be followed.⁸⁰ Temple decorations from Aihole, Ellora, (fig. 6), Bhubaneśvara, Khajuraho, etc.⁸¹ provide extensive evidence in support of this practise as do treatises on sculpture.

The cult of the Mothers was not Aryan or Vedic in origin. They personified scourges like smallpox, typhoid, cholera, hysteria, or deadly serpents, and might be propitiated by offerings of goats, pigs, hens, or buffaloes.

On admission into the Brahmanical pantheon these malevolent beings were identified as *śaktis* of the major Vedic gods: Brāhmaṇī of Brahmā; Maheśvarī or Yogeśvarī of Śiva; Vaiṣṇavī of Viṣṇu; Kaumārī of Skanda or Kumāra; Varāhī of the boar incarnation of Viṣṇu; Indrāṇī of Indra; Cāmuṇḍā or Narasiṃhī of Yama. They were conceived in the images of their male consorts, and therefore were given the same ornaments, weapons, and *vāhanas*. Perhaps that is why in their earliest appearances, in the Kushan and Gupta periods, they lack the frightful features seen in late sculptures, and may even seem charming. However they are entirely different in nature from their companion gods. The account of their origin given in the *Varāha-*

⁷⁶ Based on V. S. Aggarwala, "Khandhamaha," in *Ancient Hindu Folk Cults*, Varanasi 1970, pp. 69–96.

⁷⁷ J. R. Gharapure trans., *Yājñavalkya Smṛti*, Bombay 1936–40, pp. 540, 554.

⁷⁸ Quoted by Kane, *History of the Dharmasāstras*, Poona 1953, vol. IV, p. 529, fn. 1184.

⁷⁹ Bruno Dagens, ed. and trans., *Le Mayamata*, Pondichery 1976, xxxvi, 211–12.

⁸⁰ Quoted by Banerjea, *Hindu Iconography*, p. 505.

⁸¹ In Aihole, the Tarabasapa, Huchchimalligudi, and Ravanaphade temples. In Ellora, caves nos. 14, 16, 21, 22. At Bhubaneśvara, the Parasurameśvara temple. At Khajuraho, the Visvanatha and Kandariya Mahadeva temples. At Khandagiri, the Navamuni gumphā and Barabhuji gumphā caves depict Gaṇeśa at the head of a row of *śāsana devī* or *yakṣi*.

*purāṇa*⁸² says that they were created by Śiva to aid him in his fight against the demon Andhaka. They personify (in the order of their names given above): pride; desire; illusion; attachment; greed; envy; fault-finding; and tale-bearing. Vināyaka is both an embodiment of these evil forces and their lord, Viḡṇeśvara.

Gaṇeśa and the Navagrabhas:

The Gaṇeśa cult is also associated with the cult of the *Navagrabhas*, nine “planets” (the sun and moon, the five recognized planets, and the two mythical eclipse demons, Rāhu and Ketu), which grew up under foreign influence around the fifth century A.D. Though *grabhas* are both malefic and beneficent, the term generally means an evil power. *Vīramitrodaya*, x, 72, a commentary on the *Yājñavalkya Smṛti*⁸³ always associates the worship of Vināyaka with that of the “planets.” Again, according to the *Garuḍapurāṇa*⁸⁴ in concluding the worship of Vināyaka, among others, the tutelary deities of the “planets” should be worshipped.

The sculptural evidence for the association of Gaṇeśa with the nine is sparse and late (fig. 7). The combination is found on a late Guptan fragment from Sarnath depicting the great decease of the Buddha; on an eleventh century architectural fragment from Nalanda; and on a slab from Kankandighi in West Bengal.⁸⁵

Gaṇeśa in Buddhism:

The Buddhist *sādhana*s describe⁸⁶ and the Buddhist idols portray Gaṇeśa in both his destructive and beneficent aspects. He may be shown lying prostrate under a benign goddess, or being trampled underfoot. *Sādhana* no. 204 of the *Sādhana-mālā* describes the esoteric guardian god Aparājita as trampling on him (fig. 8). On the other hand he is praised in *Sādhana* no. 307⁸⁷ as an embodiment of *siddhi*, success, and a remover of obstacles, *viḡṇahartā*. This latter role won him an honorable place at the entrance to Buddhist temples.

In Lamaism⁸⁸ he is represented as an acolyte of the Buddha serving as a god of wealth (holding a *cintāmaṇi* and riding a rat that may vomit jewels). He may also figure as a demon being trampled on by the god Mahākāla.

Gaṇeśa in Jainism:

Gaṇeśa appears rather late in Jaina literature and art, being particularly favored by the Śvetāmbara sect; in Digambara literature there is no reference to making his image.

He appears as the *yakṣa* supporter of the 23rd Tīrthaṅkara, Pārśvanātha, being given the name Pārśvayakṣa⁸⁹ or Dharmendra, and being distinguished by a *nāga* hood and a tortoise mount. Gaṇeśa images have also been found in the Jaina caves at Udayagiri and Khandagiri in

⁸² *Varāhapurāṇa* text, Bombay 1923, xxvii, 32–37.

⁸³ See note 77 above.

⁸⁴ M.N. Dutt, trans., *Garuḍapurāṇa*, Calcutta 1908, p. 291.

⁸⁵ Banerjea, *Hindu Iconography*, pp. 444–45.

⁸⁶ B. Bhattacharya, ed., *Sādhana-mālā*, Gaekwad's Oriental Series vol. I, p. 307; vol. II, p. 403; Introduction, pp. clxx–clxxiii, plates xvi, xvii.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, vol. II, p. 592. Aparājita is “the unconquerable one.”

⁸⁸ A.K. Gordon, *Iconography of Tibetan Lamaism*, Oxford 1936, pp. 27, 90, 102.

⁸⁹ Thakkar Pheru, *Vāstusāra* (in Gujarati, trans. by Bhagwan Das Jain, Jaipur 1939).

Orissa. The earliest reference to him in Jaina literature is to be found in Hemacandra's *Abhidāna-cintāmaṇi* (twelfth century).⁹⁰ Vardhamāna Sūri in his *Ācāradīkara* gives a detailed description of Gaṇeśa.

The origin of Gaṇeśa appears to be non-Indian, inasmuch as the Indian pantheon is essentially anthropomorphic in character, and animals as a rule, are the *vāhanas* or mounts of Indian deities. We suggest that the concept of an elephant-headed god was an importation from Egypt via the Hellenistic kings of the Middle East and the Indo-Greeks of northwestern India.

According to ancient Egyptian zoolatry, the divine can manifest itself in animals and birds.⁹¹ In Egypt the earliest divinities were frequently represented in animal forms: Khanum, god of fecundity, as a ram; Anubis, god of the dead, as a jackal; Thoth, god of learning, as an ibis or baboon; Sobek, god of waterways, as a crocodile; Bastet, goddess of joy and love, as a cat; Apis as the sacred bull. With the growth of the concept of divinities in human form, these beings came to be conceived in therioanthropomorphic guise, with animal or bird heads and human bodies. So Ra, the sun, might be animal or bird or reptile-headed; Seth had the head of a donkey; Thoth that of an ibis or baboon; Sobek that of a crocodile; Sekhmet, the war goddess, that of a lioness; Thoueris, the goddess protecting women in child-birth, that of a female hippopotamus.

It seems that the motif of an animal head was borrowed by the Hellenistic Greeks from Egypt, to emphasize that the king was a manifestation of divine power. The Seleucid monarchs, whose political and cultural power at its height extended from the Phoenician coast to the Hindu Kush, entrusted an important symbolic role to the whole elephant or the elephant head. To profit by this example, the Bactrian general Demetrios, whose army won ca. 180 B.C. a more lasting foothold in the Northwest than had Alexander's, had himself portrayed in profile on his coins with a kind of "elephant scalp" at reduced scale above his helm (fig. 9).⁹²

On some of Demetrios' coins which call him "Supreme Being" (datable 190–171 B.C.), the figure of an elephant appears on the obverse with a caduceus on the reverse. In Indo-Greek coinage the obverse is usually reserved for a representation of the king who issued the coin, or the king whose memory it commemorates.⁹³ Thus the elephant on the obverse can be identified symbolically with the "Supreme Being" Demetrios. The caduceus was the Greek symbol of power that, *inter alia*, produced wealth and prosperity, the special features of Gaṇeśa in Indian religious beliefs.

On coins of Antimachos (circa 171–160 B.C.), the elephant stands on the obverse while on the reverse is a standing winged Nike, the Greek goddess of victory, holding a wreath and palm or a winged thunderbolt, the weapon of Zeus and Pallas Athene.⁹⁴ The reverse of coins of Antialcidas (circa 145–135 B.C.) shows Zeus enthroned holding a miniature winged Nike at the

⁹⁰ M. P. Tiwari, "Gaṇeśa in Jaina Literature and Art," *Navanita Digest* (in Hindi), Jan. 1978, pp. 105–07.

⁹¹ Lionel Casson, *Ancient Egypt*, Time-Life Books, New York 1965, pp. 71–72, 75, drawings on pp. 184–185.

⁹² Michael Mitchiner, *Indo-Greek and Scythian Coinage*, vol. I, *The Early Indo-Greeks and Their Antecedents*, London 1975, Type 108. Most of the material that follows here has been published earlier in W. W. Tarn, *The Greeks in Bactria and India*, 2nd ed. Cambridge University Press, 1951, esp., pp. 138, 212–213, 313, 402 (the last a coin of the Saka chief Maues showing an elephant "dancing" and offering a wreath). Also cf. A. N. Lahiri, *A Corpus of Indo-Greek Coins*, Calcutta 1965, esp. pp. 23, 27, 32, 189, 212, and pls. II, 2; IV, 7; V, 13; XI, and XII.

⁹³ The exceptions are the coins of Apollodotos I, Antimachos II, Telephus, and some of Menander I and Hermaeus.

⁹⁴ Mitchiner, *op. cit.*, Types 130, 132, 133.

right; emerging on the left is a profile elephant protome, offering the wreath of victory on its outstretched trunk. A less formal design shows a walking profile Zeus with his sceptre, backed by a profile elephant holding the little Nike.⁹⁵

On a coin of Eucratides (circa 171–135 B.C.) the reverse presents the city goddess of Kapiśa seated left, holding a palm, balanced by a mountain and the forepart of an elephant. The inscription reads *Kaviśiye nagara devatā*, the god of the city of Kapiśi or Kapiśa.⁹⁶ Centuries later when the city was visited by the Chinese pilgrim Hsüan-tsang he found its tutelary deity a mountain called “Pi-lo-sa-lo” (Pīlusāra), manifest in the shape of an elephant.⁹⁷ For the Greeks this guardian had been Zeus.

Thus on some Indo-Greek coins an elephant might replace a throned Zeus or be paired with him. The most explicit combinations were evolved by the introduction as an intermediate symbol of a miniature figure of a winged Victory, the Greek Nike. As we have seen in one active version these figures move to the left as if in procession. In more formal terms the throned Zeus holding a Nike on the right was balanced by the elephant emerging on the left, holding a wreath. Here perhaps are the elements, still set in Hellenistic terms, of a kind of cult triad that much later would bring together Śiva, Gaṇeśa, and Kārttikeya: the leading god humanised, the power of Nature personified as an elephant, and the personification of victory in war.

A plausible further step would be one in which the two local gods were merged in one figure with both kinds of divine attributes. As has been noted earlier, this is one interpretation of the silver coin of the last Indo-Greek king, Hermaeus, now in the British Museum. The perspective throne, the human body seen in three-quarters view, and the rayed halo are solidly based in Hellenistic tradition. The one possible feature belonging to an elephant may be a trunk, descending from the face across the upper torso. More powerful authority seems to lie behind the objection that a trunk is just what this attribute does not indicate. The coin obviously presents a stimulating problem for further research elsewhere.⁹⁸

The introduction of Gaṇeśa into the Indian pantheon appears to have met a need felt at that relatively late period. Human beings have always felt menaced by the hostile forces of Nature, and have sought protection against them by worshipping deities. In India *the Siddhānta* astrology which became dominant under Babylonian and Greek influence around the third century A.D. added a new dimension to the evil with which men had to contend: the planetary forces that were believed to shape an individual's destiny. As protection against inauspicious movements of the *Navagrahas*, the nine heavenly bodies, the most effective counter-measures were held to be the performance of special rituals, the *graha pūjā* or *graha homa*. But these ceremonies required the employment of Brahmin priests and Vedic rites, and so were beyond the means of any but the powerful and affluent. Beyond or beneath these traditional measures, the worship of other protective gods and goddesses was formalized to meet the needs of the lower castes. The cult of Vināyaka or Gaṇeśa was perhaps the most successful of these substitutes called on to meet the threats of both terrestrial and planetary forces of evil. Small wonder that Gaṇeśa has been a god of the people, of the multitude. His protection extends to all.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, vol.II, *The Apogee of the Indo-Greeks*, Types 269–273.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, vol.I, Type 194.

⁹⁷ S. Beal, *Chinese Accounts of India*, Calcutta, 1957 (ed.) Vol.I, p. 127.

⁹⁸ The author wishes to acknowledge gratefully the help received from Prof. A.C. Soper in developing the evidence of coins to set out the role of Indo-Greeks in the evolution of the Gaṇeśa cult.